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Should a Wife be Forgiven?

If there are
"Extenuating Circumstances"—
there is "Extreme Provocation"—
she was "Tempted Beyond
Human Endurance"—
Her Husband was "Partly
to Blame"—

Mrs. James C. Bishop,
Who Won a Divorce
from Her
Husband, the Wall
Street Banker, in the
Most Interesting
Divorce Case New
York Society
Has Known in a
Generation.



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TO FORGIVE or not to forgive" has now become the most absorbing question in many social circles.

The question follows the recent Bishop divorce case, which has interested New York fashionable society and American society in a larger sense, more than any case that has occurred in many years.

The announcement, made after the divorce, that J. Temple Gwathmey would be reconciled with his wife is what chiefly stirs society now. Judge Goff granted an absolute divorce to Mrs. Abigail Hancock Bishop on the ground of her husband's relations with Mrs. Lella Gaines Gwathmey.

According to earlier American standards, Mr. Gwathmey would have been expected to sue his wife for divorce, to show unrelenting bitterness toward her and, perhaps, to make an attempt to slay the disturber of his domestic peace. It is interesting to note that present day society appears to consider that Mr. Gwathmey has taken a better course.

The social philosophers of to-day say that a man should stop and consider whether there are not "extenuating circumstances." A wife of good breeding and excellent conduct for many years is not likely to go astray if her home life is perfectly happy.

In this divorce case it was testified that there was friction between Mr. and Mrs. Gwathmey before Bishop appeared. Friction cannot come from the wife alone. Bishop testified that on more than one occasion he asked Mrs. Gwathmey and her husband to dinner and that the husband refused to go, letting his wife go alone. In this observers see an "extenuating circumstance."

There may be "extreme provocation" which would reduce a wife's culpability to the lowest degree, just as it does in a charge of murder. There is no positive evidence to show that any such provocation existed in this case. It is impossible to say whether or not it occurred in the early incidents that caused friction between husband and wife.

Gwathmey, who is a wealthy cotton broker and ex-president of the Cotton Exchange, played golf whenever he could at the Apawamis links, and on such occasions left his wife alone. Mrs. Gwathmey, who was formerly Miss Lella Gaines, a Southern girl, was remarkably beautiful, an exquisite blonde, tall, with a superbly graceful figure. She had always been greatly admired and courted, and any neglect would wear an exaggerated aspect to such a woman.

Some philosophers maintain that a wife may be "tempted beyond human endurance." Is such a defence compatible with true morality? Is morality merely a question of circumstances?

Those who support the temptation theory, say that if a wife is consistently neglected, affronted or ill-treated by her husband, and if, on the other hand, she is thrown into the society of a man who shows her every possible attention, including dinners, motor rides, theatre parties and a constant flow of flattering conversation, then the temptation goes beyond human endurance.

There was no evidence that Mr. Gwathmey ill-treated his wife, but there was estrangement, which might mean neglect. On the other hand, we know that Mr. Bishop was ex-

Mrs. Lella Gaines Gwathmey, the Beautiful Correspondent, Whose Reported Reconciliation with Her Husband Is the Most Interesting Problem of This Remarkable Divorce Case.

"The Fallen Idol," by John Collier, the Most Discussed Picture in the Current Royal Academy. It Illustrates the Problem in the Bishop Case, and Shows a Husband Listening to His Wife's Confession.



The Saviour and the Erring Woman. "Go and Sin No More." (St. John, viii., 11.)
From the Drawing by Gustave Doré.



traordinarily tender, delicate and assiduous in his attentions.

The menu of the dinners which he offered to his fair companion, when read in court, caused the mouths of many to water. The clear green turtle soup, the mallard ducks, the old-fashioned whiskey cocktail, the champagne of a special vintage, the very ancient brandy called up a picture of a banquet that would tempt anybody of epicurean tastes.

In view of the convivial character of these affairs, it is curious to note that Mrs. Bishop, the accuser, was accused of intemperance by Mrs. Gwathmey. In affidavits submitted by the latter's counsel, it was stated that Mrs. Bishop sometimes took a quart of whiskey a day and sometimes fifteen cocktails, that she was very fond of gin, brandy and veronal.

Another curious fact was that Mr. Bishop while dining extra-conjugally, ordered a bottle of the special water, Orchard Spring Water, which was bottled at his own estate. His wife had won considerable praise in the social world by her success in promoting this water commercially.

In Mr. Bishop's testimony there was an evident effort to suggest that he was an object of sympathy. He said that his married life was "very unhappy" and started to give an account of his troubles with his wife. It is hard to find excuses for a middle-aged man with five daughters who misbehaves himself like Mr. Bishop, but modern society would do justice even to him.

Then it is said that the wife was a suffragette, that she was a splendid organizer, possessing great executive ability, a good business woman and great social worker. She organized the Children's Orchestra, which was a great success, and many other affairs. Experience shows, however, that a man needs a loving wife, rather than one possessing great executive ability.

Mr. Gwathmey's course in becoming reconciled

with his wife is the feature of the case that excites the most general approbation. It redeems a sad affair with a touch of heroism. Even admitting that he was partly to blame, his conduct, nevertheless, shows great unselfishness and restraint. Undoubtedly, in the majority of such cases, the husband is "partly to blame." Would any wife wander astray if her husband was perfectly devoted to her? But then we must remember that it is impossible for any man to be perfect.

By omitting to bring a divorce suit, it is urged, Mr. Gwathmey makes the best of a sad affair. He avoids bringing additional disgrace on his wife. He does the best for his two sons, one a boy at school and the other at college. If they have natural feelings they must be attached to their mother, while looking to their father for support. A divorce would embitter their lives and destroy their home relations.

It should not be forgotten that in forgiving his wife's sins a man is following the injunctions of the Christian religion. We cannot draw any other lesson than this from the words of the Saviour, spoken of the erring woman "Let him that is without sin among you, cast the first stone."

Men go to church every Sunday, ask forgiveness for their sins and promise forgiveness to others, and yet they think that a wife's sin is the one unforgivable sin. This feeling must be partly due to a feeling of injured egotism and vanity and partly to an ancient barbarous sense of personal ownership in a wife. This sense has been inherited from the primitive ages, when a man gained his wife by force. To take her from him was like stealing his favorite stone hatchet or some very choice piece of clothing, such as a bear's skin.

The morality of modern civilization appears to hold that a man should consider the rights and wrongs of both sides, and forgive his wife, if she will meet him in an equally reasonable spirit.